

## TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF A MOVIE SERIES “FRIENDS (1994): THE ONES WITH THE WHOLE GANG FROM” SEASON 1

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### Abstract

This research examines the quality of Indonesian subtitles in the television series *Friends* (1994), focusing on the episode “*The Ones with the Whole Gang*” from Season 1. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis, the research analyzes ten selected subtitle excerpts to identify translation problems and evaluate applied strategies. The analysis is based on Dynamic Equivalence Theory (Nida, 1964), Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), and the functionalist approach to audiovisual translation. The findings indicate that many subtitles rely on literal translation, resulting in unnatural expressions, inappropriate register, loss of humor, and reduced readability. Additionally, improper handling of nonverbal cues and sentence segmentation negatively affects audience comprehension. Nevertheless, effective use of adaptation and modulation demonstrates the potential for improving subtitle quality. The study concludes that functional, purpose-oriented translation strategies are essential for producing natural, culturally appropriate, and communicative subtitles in audiovisual media.

**Key words:** audiovisual translation; subtitling; translation strategies; dynamic equivalence; Skopos theory

### INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized society, audiovisual media, such as movies and television shows, are effective tools for cultural exchange and knowledge transmission. However, language variations frequently create major difficulties for audiences who do not speak the original language of the information. Subtitles have thus become critical in breaking down these boundaries, allowing audiences from various language backgrounds to access, comprehend, and appreciate worldwide media. Subtitling is not merely a matter of converting words from one language to another; it involves complex decisions to maintain the message's semantic, cultural, and emotional nuances while adhering to temporal and spatial constraints (Díaz- Cintas & Remael, 2007).

This research focuses on the subtitle translation analysis of the series *Friends* (1994): *The Ones with the Whole Gang* (Season 1). *Friends* is a movie series that have a lot of humor in it. The actors are playing words to have a spin in which it makes the movie funny. Therefore, some previous researches on *Friends* movie series focused on the humor (Syifa and Himmawati, 2016). Besides the wordplay, the movie series also have a lot of idiomatic expressions which make it

difficult when translated into other language, in this case Arabic (Mudawe, 2024). The study examines ten carefully selected samples of subtitle translations into Bahasa Indonesia that are either non-equivalent or great equivalents, including idiomatic terms, in order to assess translation quality in the perspective of contemporary translation theories. The examples were chosen and examined based on how well they convey the original content, cultural relevance, and overall influence on the intended audience. It was done to find the answers of two questions, namely: a. how is the translation of the subtitle in the movie, and b. is the translation equivalent. The analysis will rely on fundamental theoretical frameworks such as Nida's idea of dynamic equivalence (1964), which prioritizes the subject's response and comprehension, and Vermeer's Skopos theory (1989), which emphasizes the aim of the translation as a guiding factor in translation decisions.

Furthermore, this study will give corrected translation versions for the non-equivalent subtitles, describing the translation processes and procedures employed, such as modification, modulation, and compensation, to better represent the original purpose. To ensure effective communication and audience engagement, subtitles must be clear, culturally acceptable, and coordinated with the audiovisual content (Gambier 2013). This research focuses on the limitations and complications of subtitle translation, such as representation of idiomatic expressions. This work contributes to the understanding and execution of effective subtitle translation procedures by conducting a systematic analysis and making practical improvement recommendations. Finally, the purpose of this research is not only to evaluate the selected subtitle translations, but also to provide insights and recommendations for improving the quality of subtitle translation in audiovisual material, allowing worldwide audiences to have better access and a deeper viewing experience.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using content analysis to examine the quality of Indonesian subtitles in the television series *Friends* (1994), specifically the episode "*The Ones with the Whole Gang*" from Season 1. This approach is appropriate as the research focuses on interpreting meaning, function, and effectiveness of subtitle translations rather than measuring numerical data.

The research object consists of English dialogues as the source text and their Indonesian subtitles as the target text. Data were selected through purposive sampling, resulting in ten subtitle excerpts that represent both successful and problematic translations. The selection criteria included the presence of idiomatic expressions, humor, cultural references, shifts in register, and technical constraints of subtitling.

Data collection was conducted by repeatedly watching the selected episode, transcribing relevant source and target text pairs, and identifying subtitles that reflect translation issues or effective strategies. The collected data were then categorized based on recurring translation problems and applied strategies.

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively by comparing the source text and target text using the theoretical framework of Dynamic Equivalence (Nida, 1964), Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), and the functionalist approach to audiovisual translation. Translation strategies such as adaptation, modulation, compensation, omission, and literal translation were analyzed to evaluate subtitle naturalness, clarity, cultural appropriateness, and communicative effectiveness. For inaccurate subtitles, alternative translations were proposed to better fulfill the intended communicative purpose.

## **TRANSLATION STRATEGIES**

### **Dynamic Equivalence Theory**

This theory emphasizes producing a translation that conveys the same effect and meaning to the target audience as the original text does to the source audience. In subtitle translation, it focuses on naturalness and readability rather than word-for-word translation. For example, idiomatic expressions are translated into culturally equivalent expressions familiar to the target viewers rather than literal renderings that may confuse them.

### **Skopos Theory**

Skopos theory centers on the purpose (skopos) of the translation. The translator makes decisions based on the intended function of the translated subtitles, such as ensuring viewer comprehension or entertainment. In subtitles, this often means adapting content to fit screen space and viewing speed, as well as cultural relevance.

### **Functionalist Approach**

This approach involves tailoring the translation to the communicative function and context within the audiovisual medium. It aligns with both dynamic equivalence and Skopos theories. Functionalist principles justify strategies like shortening or simplifying dialogues while retaining the core message.

## Common Translation Strategies for Subtitle Translation

### ***Adaptation***

Changing cultural references or idiomatic expressions to make them more accessible to the target audience. *Example:* Translating “Piece of cake” (meaning “very easy”) into an equivalent idiom in the target language rather than a literal fruit-based phrase.

### ***Modulation***

Changing the form of the message by altering the perspective or emphasis without changing the meaning. *Example:* Instead of “You have no idea,” subtitling it as “You don’t realize” for better flow.

### ***Compensation***

Introducing an element of meaning in another part of the subtitle to compensate for losses due to time or space constraints. *Example:* Where a joke or pun cannot be fully translated in one subtitle, another subtitle may include additional context.

### ***Omission***

Deliberately leaving out untranslated elements like puns or culturally specific jokes when they are impossible to translate without confusing the audience.

### ***Literal Translation***

Translating word-for-word without considering cultural differences. Usually not recommended for subtitles because it can result in incomprehensible or awkward translations.

## Application to *Friends* (1994) Subtitle Translation

1. An idiomatic phrase poorly translated literally without adaptation may confuse viewers (violation of Dynamic Equivalence).
2. A subtitle effectively using adaptation to localize a joke shows an application of Skopos and Functionalist theories.
3. Space constraints in subtitles leading to omission or condensation reflect practical translation strategy adjustments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Results

#### ***Literal Translation Leading to Unnaturalness***



The subtitle *“lebih dari satu suku kata itu harus seperti keripik atau saus atau pretz”* illustrates a case of literal, word-for-word translation that results in an unnatural and confusing expression for Indonesian viewers. The structure and lexical choices closely follow the source text without considering natural usage in the target language, causing the intended meaning to be unclear. This problem violates Dynamic Equivalence Theory (Nida, 1964), which emphasizes that a translation should convey the same meaning and effect to the target audience rather than reproduce the exact linguistic form of the source text. To address this issue, the translator should employ adaptation by restructuring the sentence and simplifying the list into expressions that are more familiar and culturally acceptable to the target audience. Such adaptation would enhance readability, naturalness, and overall communicative effectiveness of the subtitle.

### ***Inclusion of Metadata and Redundant Tags in Subtitles***

The subtitle *“ingin uh tidak lihat Bahasa Indonesia: uh kamu kamu tidak bisa melakukan itu tidak”* demonstrates improper subtitle construction due to the inclusion of unnecessary language tags and filler sounds. Elements such as *“Bahasa Indonesia”* and repeated hesitation markers like *“uh”* create visual clutter and distract viewers from the core message of the dialogue. This issue contradicts Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), which emphasizes that subtitles should fulfill their communicative purpose clearly, efficiently, and without redundant information. Subtitles are intended to support comprehension rather than reproduce every spoken hesitation or technical label. To improve readability and effectiveness, the translator should apply omission by removing irrelevant metadata and filler sounds, resulting in a cleaner, more concise subtitle that better serves the viewing experience.

### ***Incoherent and Fragmented Sentences Reducing Clarity***

The subtitle *“klub tidak uh PHS Anda tidak dapat melakukannya Anda tidak dapat menunggu saya memiliki spade tenis di sini Anda”* exhibits a lack of coherence due to awkward repetitions, fragmented structure, and disordered word sequence. These issues significantly hinder viewer comprehension and disrupt the natural flow of the dialogue. Such a translation fails to meet the principles of the Functionalist Approach, which emphasizes that translations—particularly subtitles—should prioritize clarity and fulfill their communicative function within the audiovisual context. Subtitles must present information in a concise and easily readable form, taking into account time and space constraints. To improve this subtitle, the translator should apply condensation and reordering, eliminating redundant elements and restructuring the sentence into a logical and coherent form that reflects natural speech patterns and enhances readability.

### ***Formal Pronoun Usage in Informal Conversation***

The use of the formal pronoun *“Anda”* to translate the English second-person pronoun *“you”* in casual dialogue represents a mismatch in register and speech style. In an informal television series

such as *Friends*, characters typically interact using colloquial and intimate language, making the use of a formal pronoun sound unnatural and distancing for the target audience. This issue contradicts Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), which emphasizes that translation choices should align with the communicative purpose and contextual tone of the source text. Maintaining appropriate levels of formality is essential to preserving character relationships and conversational authenticity. To address this problem, the translator should apply modulation by shifting the level of formality and replacing “*Anda*” with informal pronouns such as “*kamu*”, thereby enhancing naturalness and better reflecting the original conversational context.

### ***Poor Handling of Nonverbal Signs and Sound Cues***

The insertion of sound cues such as “[*Musik*]” within the same subtitle line as spoken dialogue creates ambiguity and may confuse viewers regarding which elements are actually being spoken. Mixing nonverbal information with verbal content disrupts subtitle clarity and interferes with the reading process. According to established audiovisual translation guidelines (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007), nonverbal cues should be clearly distinguished from dialogue to ensure effective communication. Subtitles function optimally when verbal and nonverbal information are presented in an organized and readable manner. To resolve this issue, the translator should apply separation and formatting by presenting sound cues on independent subtitle lines and enclosing them in brackets, thereby improving readability and preventing misinterpretation.

### ***Awkward Vocabulary and Phrasing Due to Literal Translation***

The subtitle “*ini apakah buku jari yang retak mengganggu*” illustrates a case of literal, word-for-word translation that results in an unnatural and awkward expression in the target language. Although the lexical meaning of the source text is technically transferred, the resulting phrase does not conform to natural Indonesian usage and may confuse viewers. This problem violates the principle of Dynamic Equivalence (Nida, 1964), which emphasizes the use of idiomatic and fluent expressions to achieve a similar effect on the target audience. To improve the subtitle, the translator should employ adaptation by replacing the literal wording with a culturally familiar and idiomatic expression that conveys the intended meaning more naturally and effectively.

### ***Redundant Repetition That Impedes Readability***

The subtitle “*uh kamu kamu tidak bisa melakukan itu tidak*” contains redundant word repetition and filler sounds that significantly reduce readability. The repetition of pronouns and hesitation markers does not add meaningful information and instead disrupts the flow of reading. Such redundancy negatively affects subtitle clarity and viewer comprehension. According to the Functionalist Approach, subtitles should prioritize conciseness and communicative efficiency, particularly due to temporal and spatial constraints. To address this issue, the translator should apply omission by

removing unnecessary repetitions and filler sounds, resulting in a cleaner and more readable subtitle.

### ***Loss of Humor and Character Tone***

In several instances, flat and literal subtitle translations fail to convey the humor, sarcasm, and distinctive character tone present in the original dialogue. As a result, the comedic effect and emotional nuance—key elements of a sitcom like *Friends*—are diminished. This issue undermines the communicative purpose of the translation and conflicts with Skopos Theory, which emphasizes fulfilling the intended function of the target text, including entertainment. To preserve humor and character voice, the translator should employ compensation and adaptation, allowing humorous effects to be recreated through culturally appropriate expressions rather than literal equivalence.

### ***Inconsistent Sentence Breaks Affect Flow***

Fragmented subtitles such as “*ya kalau tidak seseorang mungkin mendapatkan apa yang sebenarnya mereka pesan*” demonstrate ineffective sentence segmentation that disrupts meaning cohesion. Abrupt or illogical breaks make subtitles harder to process and interfere with smooth reading. According to audiovisual translation principles, subtitles should be segmented according to natural linguistic and semantic units. To improve readability, the translator should apply segmentation strategies that align sentence breaks with meaningful syntactic and semantic boundaries.

### ***Mismatched Tone in Formality and Emotion***

Some subtitles display a mismatch in emotional tone and formality, such as using overly formal or neutral expressions (e.g., “*menarik*” for “*charming*”) in contexts that require informal or expressive language. This tone mismatch distances the subtitle from the original character’s personality and emotional intent. According to Dynamic Equivalence, effective translation should reproduce not only meaning but also tone and style. To resolve this issue, the translator should apply modulation by selecting expressions that better reflect the emotional register and conversational style of the source dialogue.

## **Discussions**

The analysis of subtitle translations in a specific episode of *Friends* (1994) indicates several key flaws that affect overall quality and audience comprehension. First, the subtitles frequently contain literal translation errors, in which English statements are translated word for word into Indonesian without regard for colloquial equivalences or natural language flow. For example, sentences like “*lebih dari satu suku kata itu harus seperti keripik, saus, atau pretz*” demonstrate awkwardness caused by overly literal choices. This undermines dynamic equivalence, which focuses on developing a target text that elicits the same response as the source language.



Second, the presence of unnecessary metadata like "Bahasa Indonesia:" and sound indicators like "[Musik]" interspersed between conversation lines breaks and distracts the viewer. Audiovisual translation guidelines (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007) require clear separation of nonverbal sounds and spoken subtitles to prevent confusion.

Third, formality is inconsistent, as evidenced by the usage of the formal pronoun "*Anda*" in casual discussions, which contrasts with Friends' informal tone. This demonstrates a failure to conform to skopos theory (Vermeer, 1989), which urges translators to tailor their translations to the communicative goal and context.

Furthermore, many subtitles feature broken, repeated, or incomprehensible language that impair comprehension. Examples such as "*uh kamu kamu tidak bisa melakukan itu tidak*" demonstrate duplication and bad editing techniques. This diminishes subtitle readability, contradicting the functionalist approach, which seeks clarity and readability for viewers.

Importantly, the loss of humor and character voice caused by flat, literal translation undermines the emotional impact and distinguishing personality features that are essential in a humorous series like Friends. Translators must use tactics like compensation and adaptation to preserve such details while maintaining the original tone and humor in order to match audience expectations.

Overall, the subtitle translation fails to strike a balance between integrity to the original text and adaptation to the target culture and language norms. Improvements are required to promote coherence and cultural relevance, natural tone, and technical presentation of subtitles.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the subtitle translation of Friends (1994) Season 1 episode, as examined from the provided video, has substantial flaws, primarily related to literal translation, improper formal tone, bad editing, and insufficient management of audiovisual conventions. These challenges have jeopardized subtitle clarity, cultural relevance, and audience involvement. To obtain good subtitle translation, translators must use proven theories like dynamic equivalence, skopos theory, and functionalist approach. Translation strategies such as modification, modulation, compensation, omission, and suitable segmentation should be used to guarantee that subtitles are not only accurate but also natural, culturally sensitive, and pleasant to the intended audience. Addressing these issues will improve the accessibility and viewing experience of international media for a diverse audience.



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